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LOCAL & THE CAROLINAS

LEGAL AID CHANGING NAME, NOT SERVICE

By Elaine Gaston The Sun News

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Civil **legal services** to low-income residents in Horry and Georgetown counties will continue despite administrative changes in the program Jan. 1.

Legal aid office locations and the attorneys staffing them, however, could potentially change as the program now serving Horry and Georgetown counties finalizes a deal with S.C. Centers for Equal Justice, the new **legal aid** program that officially begins serving South Carolinians after the new year.

"No matter what happens through those negotiations, services will be provided to clients in Horry and Georgetown counties as they are across the state," said Faith Rivers, a member of the S.C. Bar Foundation and state planning team that established the S.C. Centers for Equal Justice. "The only thing that might change is the name over the door. ... There will be offices for clients to meet with their attorneys."

Offices in Horry and Georgetown counties and the seven employees who staff them are supervised by Neighborhood Legal Assistance Program in Charleston, one of five programs funded by **Legal Services** Corp. in Washington, D.C., until Jan. 1. LSC is a private, nonprofit corporation established by Congress in 1974 to assure equal access to justice. It allocates \$329 million in federal funds annually.

South Carolina, with a poverty population of 517,793, received \$4.5 million this year and will receive \$4.6 million next year.

LSC has funded five programs in South Carolina and four in North

Carolina, but has agreed with both states to consolidate service into one service area in each state.

The new plan calls for seven advocates, including attorneys and paralegals, to serve the Grand Strand area, which includes Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg and Clarendon counties. Horry and Georgetown currently have four advocates, one of whom also covers Marion County.

"We have found by consolidating and streamlining leadership, it frees up more resources to serve more poor people," said Eric Kleiman spokesman for LSC. "We have every reason to believe client service will get better and not worse."